

On Cigaretts, Cancer, People

Closing the cover on our lighter and inhaling deeply from a newly lighted cigaret, we now set hands to typewriter to comment on the latest pronouncement concerning cigaretts and cancer.

Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney announced this week that the preponderance of evidence points to cigaretts as the chief cause of the alarming rise in lung cancer among Americans.

The tobacco industry, in quick retort, says that the facts don't support Burney's contention, that other factors were ignored by the Federal official in arriving at his conclusions.

We won't attempt to judge this situation here. Burney's announcement did seem to lack supporting evidence that was solid. On the other hand, the tobacco industry's experts have a selfish purpose to serve and their views must be weighed in that light.

The point that strikes us is that such pronouncements are unlikely to have any appreciable effect on smoking habits of Americans over any extended period. Mass warnings are difficult to relate to individual behavior, so until one's own physician tells a person to stop, he's likely to ignore such statements as Burney's. And, since more doctors smoke than not, who are they to tell us not to do the same?

On this inconclusive note, we'll move on to another subject, having snuffed out the butt of our cigaret and reached for another

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The Cranberry Bog And Cigarette Fog

APPLE SAUCE accompanied the Thanksgiving turkey at the White House, but cranberries held their accustomed place at Vice President Nixon's house. Thus the citizen who looks to the Administration for guidance in health matters was left in some confusion—a confusion further confounded by the fact that the public Health Service chose the same holiday for a renewal of its attack on cigarettes.

The effect was simply a renewal of the debate between those on the one hand, including the Public Health Service's chief, Surgeon General BURNLEY, who relate cigarettes to lung cancer, and those on the other hand who insist that no relation has been proved. The tobacco industry, including both the manufacturers and growers, reacted with predictable vigor to Dr. BURNLEY's argument, which had the implicit support of Secretary FLEMMING of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. It was Mr. FLEMMING who set off the cranberry crisis.

Smokers are more devoted to tobacco, even when inhaled through filter tips (which, incidentally, Dr. BURNLEY says are of little or no avail), than anybody is to cranberries. Who ever heard of a cranberry addict? Thus a cigarette crisis, comparable to the cranberry crisis, is unlikely, and we imagine that the housewife who shrank from cranberries in the supermarket will, if she smokes, patronize the cigarette shelves as always.

Scientific evidence is adduced on both sides of the cigarette argument, and the layman feels unqualified to participate. Its present renewal sounds to him like another installment of an old serial, enlivened this time by Representative WARREN of Kentucky, whose district is a heavy producer of fine burley. "Perhaps," said Mr. WARREN, "Secretary FLEMMING has had his subordinates throw up a smokescreen to hide the fact that he is still stuck in the cranberry bog." Meanwhile, the smoker, lost in a fog of conflicting claims and statistics, soothes his nerves in the usual way.

The Iconoclasts

FIRST, there was Arthur S. Flemming, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, to sour Thanksgiving with derogatory remarks about cranberries.

Now, the Surgeon General of the U. S., Dr. Leroy E. Burney, takes out after cigaretts with what is the strongest language that the Government has yet used in linking them to cancer. "The weight of evidence, at present," says Dr. Burney, "implicates smoking as the principal etiological [causative] factor in the increased incidence of lung cancer . . . Cigaret smoking particularly is associated with an increased chance of developing lung cancer." And Dr. Burney also claims: "No method of treating tobacco or filtering the smoke has been demonstrated to be effective in materially reducing or eliminating the hazard of lung cancer."

Furthermore, Secretary Flemming, not satisfied with his cranberry stew, has spoken unkind words lately about misleading toothpaste ads.

As we sip our cranberry juice, puff the weed through a filter tip, and smile in the certainty that our toothpaste is fighting decay all day, we wonder what things are coming to in Washington. Next they'll be telling us that a pen can't write through butter.